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Sen. Allen's snowmobile trail legislation passes Senate

LANSING – Legislation designed to create options for Michigan's snowmobile trail system, including the area between Gaylord and Cheboygan, was unanimously passed by the Michigan State Senate on Wednesday, announced Sen. Jason Allen, R- Traverse City.

"Passing this bill means we are one step closer to providing snowmobile riders across Michigan with more trails to enjoy all winter," Allen said. "Adding these trails will support northern Michigan and the whole state's economy by expanding opportunities for winter tourists."

Senate Bill 161 would allow snowmobiles to be operated within the right-of-way limited access highways, if a trail is approved through a joint agreement by the Michigan Department of Transportation and the Department of Natural Resources. The two departments would be in charge of establishing the details of the trail to ensure appropriate safety issues are addressed.

"Creating a link between Gaylord and Cheboygan for snowmobile traffic would have tremendous potential to increase winter tourism in northern Michigan," Allen said. "Establishing this trail will allow businesses to stay open and keep people employed, which will help improve our state's economy. I am hopeful that Senate Bill 161 will help bring a resolution to this issue that has dragged on far too long."

Previously, Allen introduced SB 1329, an earlier version of SB 161, after a northern Michigan task force studying how to establish a snowmobile trail between Gaylord and Cheboygan proposed this alternative. SB 1329 was vetoed by the governor last December.

Under a compromise reached with the Executive Office, the bill would allow MDOT to prohibit snowmobile use on areas of state highway right-of-ways if snowmobile use in that area poses a specific threat to public safety. However, prior to closing a right-of-way, MDOT will be required to implement an alternate route that maintains access to businesses that rely on snowmobile-based commerce.

"Snowmobiling plays an important role in northern Michigan's winter tourism industry," Allen said. "This legislation will provide greater flexibility in expanding the state's trail system. I'm glad to have the unanimous support of the Senate and I hope the governor recognizes the importance that snowmobiling has on northern Michigan's economy when the bill reaches her desk."

Senate Bill 161 passed the Senate by an unanimous vote and now moves to the House of Representatives for consideration.